

Investigation of Child Labour in the Informal Sector in Kenema City

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ABSTRACT: *Child labour came under the international spotlight in the 1990s. For the first time diplomats and economists started discussing why a vast number of children were working instead of being in school and what should be done about it. This study which was done in 2016 investigated the effects of child labour in the informal sector in Kenema City. The objectives were to unearth the causes of the social menace, highlight the types of work children engaged in that constituted child labour, identify the effects on the health, safety and education of the children who engaged in it and assess the effectiveness of the strategies used to tackle the menace. Sixty (60) respondents including fifty (50) children, four (4) respondents from selected Government Institutions, four (4) from Non-governmental Organisations and two (2) from Community Based Organisations were used to collect the research data. Questionnaires, interviews and observation were the instruments used to collect the data. The findings reveal that child labour was existent in the informal sector in Kenema City though it is to greater extent not cognizable because most work children do that constitute the Act are taught to be child work. As such, the problem is far from over.*

It is recommended that:

- The political will to address the problem should be shown beyond every reasonable doubt by various ministries, departments and agencies integrating their efforts against the menace.*
- To reduce the level of ignorance about the practice, mass awareness and advocacy campaigns targeting employers of children, community leaders, policy makers and civil society organizations should be undertaken.*
- Government of Sierra Leone should review its budgetary allocations upwards to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and the Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone Police to enhance their activities on child labour.*
- Community stakeholders should collaborate with state institutions in the fight against child labour.*
- Education should be made free so that children can be meaningfully engaged other than being involved in hazardous work.*
- Attention should be given to vocational education so that children who miss out on formal education can have an alternative.*
- Every effort should be applied to fight poverty in all its form in the country.*

KEY WORDS: *Child, Labour, Child labour, informal sector, Kenema City*

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the Random House Webster's Dictionary (1991), Child Labour is the gainful employment of children below the age determined by law or custom. The International Labour Organisation Minimum age Convention, (C138), refers to child labour as any work done by children under the age of 12, non-light work done by children aged 12-14, and hazardous work done by those aged 15-17. It is work that deprives children of their childhood, interferes with their regular school attendance, and is mentally, physically, socially and morally dangerous and harmful; a practice that is thought to be exploitative by many international organisations. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that about 150 million children aged 5-14 years in developing countries are involved in the practice. The informal sector, also known as the underground economy, black economy, shadow economy or grey economy is that part of a country's economy that is not recognised as normal source of income. The activities of the informal sector are neither taxed nor monitored by any form of government. The activities of the sector are not included in the country's Gross National Product (GNP) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It is unreported employment, hidden from the state for tax, social security or labour law purposes. It includes street vendors, waste pickers, street beggars, illicit miners, shoe shiners, home based workers, creative professionals such as artists, architects, designers and software developers. (Carr, Marilyn and Martha A Chen 2001) Child labour came under the spotlight in the 1990s.

For the first time since the industrialised world's campaigns on the issue a century earlier, diplomats and economists discussed why the vast number of children were working instead of being in school and what should be done about it. Their worries were amplified by activists in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. It was realised that the transition that started in 1989 provoked an economic crisis which hit children in particular very hard. At the outset of the 21st Century, report on child exploitation to make money for others was even more horrifying than the account that circulated during much of the 20th century. The new attention to an old issue was largely due to concerns raised in industrialised countries such as the United Kingdom. Child labour is not a new phenomenon in Sierra Leone, but only a few people and institutions have bothered to understand its causes, effects and ramifications. The problem has been mainly attributed to household poverty. The increasing number of poor households in recent times has facilitated the movement of hundreds of children out of school into work. Weak national laws and domestic violence have also been among the factors identified. An article published in the African Online News in February 2014, a report by the International Confederation of Free Trade Union (ICFTU) on core labour standards in Sierra Leone stated that "Child labour and forced labour remained a major problem in the county". The report further stated that "Child labour was widespread in Sierra Leone and law enforcement was weak. Several thousands of children were found to be working in diamond mining especially boys in an environment which resembled slave labour".

Owing to the urban informal sector's absorption capacity, it is no surprise that data published by the UNESCO institute for Statistics in 2014 indicated that 75% of working children resided in the urban communities which showed an increase in child labour cases in Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone has several policies and strategies to eliminate child labour through its existing legal and institutional frame work at national, regional and international levels. Irrespective of the framework against child labour and the establishment of various institutions in that regard, the problem of child labour still persists in the informal sector in Kenema City.

Objectives/purpose of the study

The objectives of this study were to:

- Unearth the causes of child labour in Kenema City.
- Highlight the types of work children do that constitute child labour.
- Identify the effects of the work on the health, safety and education of the children who engage in the practice and
- Assess the effectiveness of the strategies used to tackle the menace.

II. METHODOLOGY

Study Design: The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods of investigation. However, the bulk of the presentation is descriptive in nature.

Study Area: The investigation covered the greater business district of Kenema City; mainly the Gbo-Lambayama Section. The locality is identified as an area of high child labour concentration with a full-fledged urban informal sector. Kenema is the third largest city in Sierra Leone and the largest in the Eastern Region (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2015). In the 2004 National Population and Housing Census, Kenema City had a Population of 128,402 which sprang up to 188,463 in the 2015 census. The City lies approximately 300km South-east of the national capital, Freetown; and 60km South of Bo the second City in the country. Being one of the municipalities, it is governed by a City council headed by a mayor who is directly elected by the inhabitants of the locality. As the chiefdom, district and regional headquarters of Nongowa Chiefdom, Kenema District and Eastern Region respectively, Kenema City is a cultural melting pot. Besides, it is very attractive to business and is blessed with many schools, vocational institutions and a tertiary institution; the Eastern polytechnic which the people of the region are poised for government to transform into a university for a regional balance in the establishment of public universities in the country to be achieved.

Study Population and Sample: It was not easy to estimate the population of children engaged in child labour as has been indicated in the background. Some of the activities children engage in that constitute the practice are underground. However, for the purpose of the study, a sample population of sixty respondents was selected.

Sampling Procedure: As stated above, a sample population of 60 respondents was selected. Of that number, 50 were children aged 6-12. A pre-study visit was made in the City to identify specific locations where informal child labour activities were carried out. The selection of the children that constituted the sample was done by using snowballing technic and convenience sampling due to the children's high mobility level. In addition, 10

key informants were also selected of whom 4, 4 and 2 were from government institutions, Non-governmental Organisations and Community Based Organisations that had dealings with child labour related issues.

Instrumentation: Various data collection instruments including questionnaires, interviews and observation were used to collect the research data. Questionnaires were used mainly for the 10 key informants of the respondent population. Interviews and observation were used for the children. Observation was done to gather additional confirmatory information on children.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The Excel software package was used to analyse the quantitative data while the qualitative data was analysed in narrative form.

Sex of children involved in child labour: Child labour activities cut across the two sexes. Never the less members of one sex were preferred to the other for some activities as would be seen in latter discussions. Of the 50 children drawn in this research, 52% were boys and 48% were girls all between the ages of 6 and 12. Traditionally, women and girls are thought of to be inferior and domestic while men and boys are considered to be superior and public. This perception is held in almost every sphere of life. As such, though girls can in some instances be engaged in child labour outside the home, a number engage in home-based forms of child labour and are therefore not usually reached by researchers. Boys on the other hand are mostly seen outside the homes.

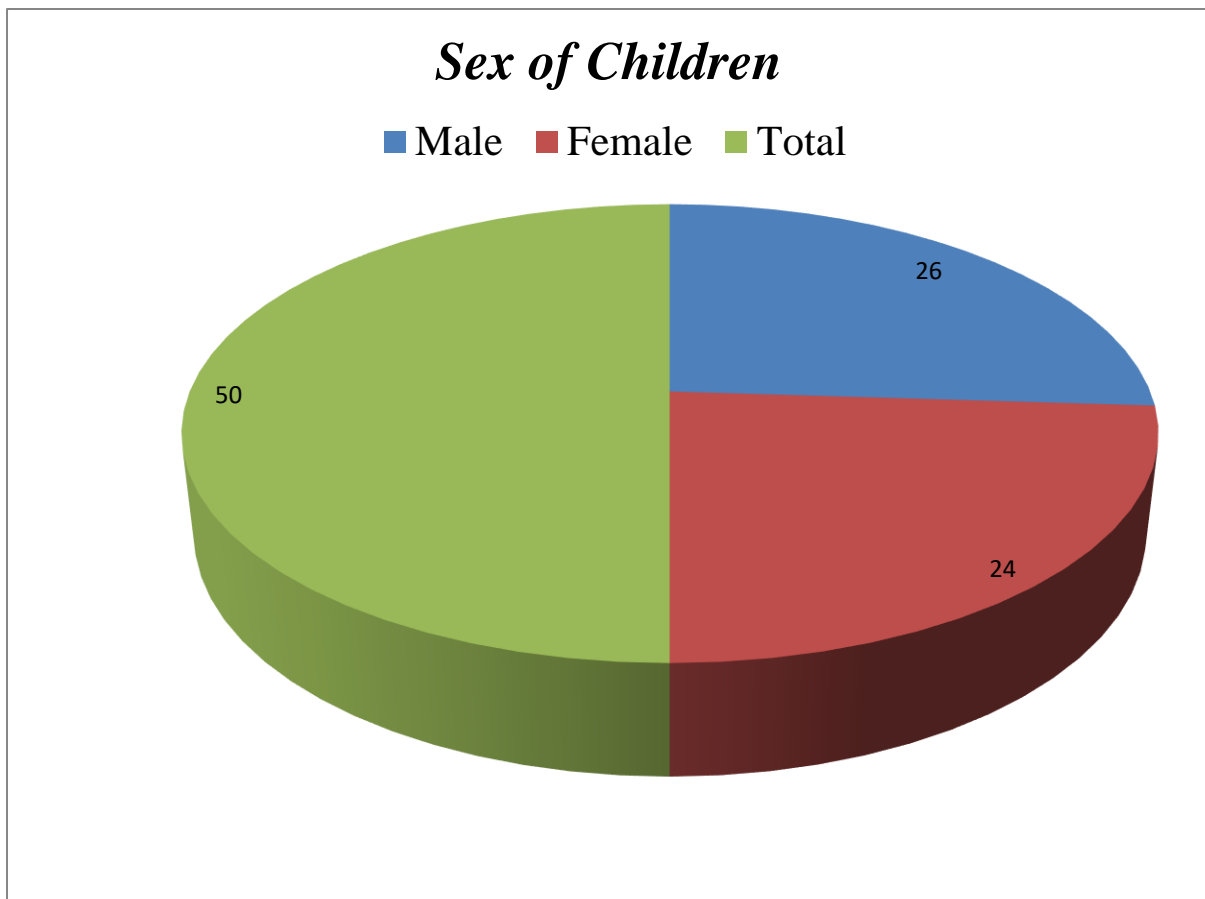


Figure I: Sex of Children involved Child Labour

Age of Children in Child Labour: The ILO minimum age convention (C138) of 1973 spells out different categories of child labour as shown in the introductory section of this work, the maximum being 17 years. However, children captured in this research were between the ages of 6-12 based on information they provided about them. Two things that could be deduced from such could be that: (1) the children did not either deliberately or out of ignorance give correct information about their age or (ii) or that the situation was so because those above age 12 feel shy to do the kind of work those reached in this research did. Of the 50

children, 56% were 12 years old, 12% were 6 years old and 32% were between the ages of 7 and 11. More of the children in the sample were in the higher age bracket below the maximum age limit of 17 for obvious reasons. Table I shows the age bracket of the children drawn in the sample.

Table I: Age of Children drawn in the Sample

Age	No. of Children
6	6
7-11	16
12	28
Total	50

Place of Birth of Respondent Children: It is predicted by demographers that Africa will be urbanised by 2050. Among the identified causes of such urbanisation is rural –urban migration. One of the implications that may likely emanate from the movement could be increased poverty because those who will leave the villages for the cities cannot easily fit into the economy. When that is the case, children may be used to cushion economic situations at home. 74% of the children reached in this study were children who had migrated from the villages into the city of Kenema. Some were with their biological parents according to information and others were either living on their own in the street or were in foster homes. 22% were born and bred in the Kenema City while 4% were from the neighboring countries-Guinea and Liberia.

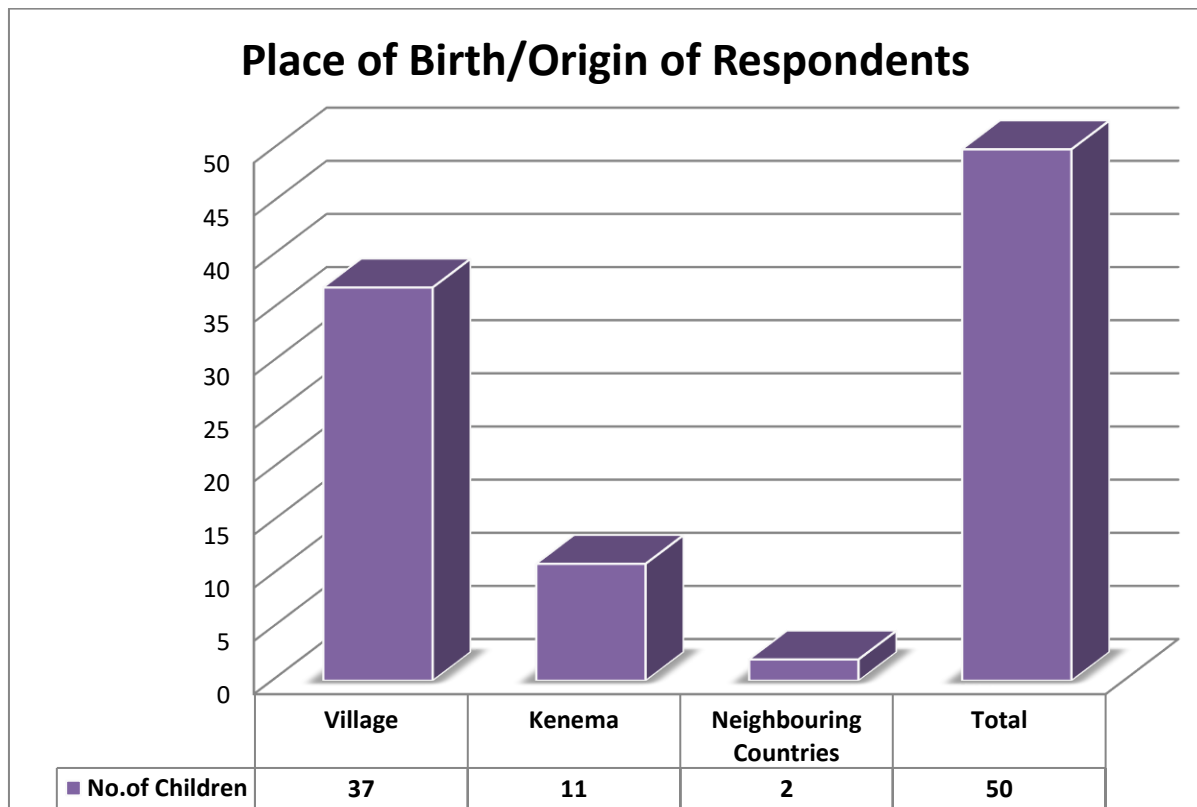


Figure II: place of birth/ origin of children

Causes of Child Labour: Every human action is prompted by a cause. Children engage in child labour because of the following reasons as shown in table II. One of the causes of child labour as indicated in the table is the family in which the child is born or lives. Every child is born into a family which influences their life chances and options. The family has a more permanent influence on the child than other agents of socialisation. The table shows that 40% of the children lived in single parent families where only one of the parents was left to care for needs of the children. In such situations, the parent in question may be over burdened providing for the children and may sometimes require the children's assistance resulting to child labour. 36% of the children

were from polygamous families which are usually large in size. The male marries so many wives who bear so many children whose needs may sometimes not be adequately provided and therefore end up engaging in work to augment meager family income. Children from monogamous families accounted for just 6%. Other causes of child labour were poverty to which 64% of the children attributed their engagement in child labour for, peer group influence, 30%; separation from biological parents, 28%; and vulnerability of parent(s) (biological parent(s) or foster), 22%. It is not uncommon to see children accompanying blind adults on the streets on begging spree at times when they should be in school. Such children may grow to consider begging as a normal practice. 28% of the children engaged in child labour because they were living in foster homes where they were subjected to domestic servanthood. They were poorly cared for and had no opportunity for schooling. Some children also had a combination of factors for their engagement in child labour.

Table II: Causes of Child Labour

No. of Children	<i>Causes of Child Labour Types of Family Children Belonged</i>				Poverty	Vulnerability of parents	Peer Group Influence	Separation from parents
	Single Parent Family	Monogamous family	Polygamous family	Children living with mother & father				
50	20	6	8	6	32	11	15	14

Child labour activities of respondents: Work that children do that affects their health, growth, development, schooling and recreation constitutes child labour. They are diverse and some are community specific. Among the ones that children in Kenema City drawn in the research engaged in were street vending, street begging, stone and sand mining, waste picking, motor bike washing, luggage carrying and hair-dressing. It should be understood that some of the children categorically stated that they were more frequent in doing some of the work than others while some of the other children did some of the jobs casually as and when the need arose. 86% of the children did street vending. The research focused the business centre of the city where a good number of the traders look for people to help them sell their wares. Apart from missing school, street vendors are also prone to being knocked down by bike (Okada) riders sometimes incurring serious injuries. The riders sometimes run away for fear of taking responsibility for the injured. The children also stand the risk of being manhandled by some traders should their money get missing.

Girls also stand the risk of rape by unscrupulous men and their peers. Next to street vending was stone/sand mining which 34% of the children said they did. Kenema City like many other settlements across the country is burgeoning. Sand and stone mining are done to meet the demand for construction. Those who do the trade look for cheap labour though they end up selling the items at exorbitant prices to the final consumers. Children sometimes take heavy loads of sand and stones only to be able to have something to take home at the end of the day. Some even get injured when stones fall on them. 20% of the children admitted to collecting waste (scrapped metals, empty trash cans, mega kola bottles, water plastics etc.) Some waste picking children can be seen around training workshop venues and restaurants where they collect the wastes and can also have remnant of food to eat. They wash dishes, scrub and clean pots and so on. Some stay around as long as the workshops last instead of going to school. 14% washed motor bikes, 8% worked in saloons, while 10% did street begging. Street begging children usually accompany adult family members especially the blind. Such children may consider begging as a normal practice and may take to it themselves. 4% of the children did other forms of child labour like shoe shining, housekeeping and the like. Figure III shows various child labour activities children in the research sample engaged in.

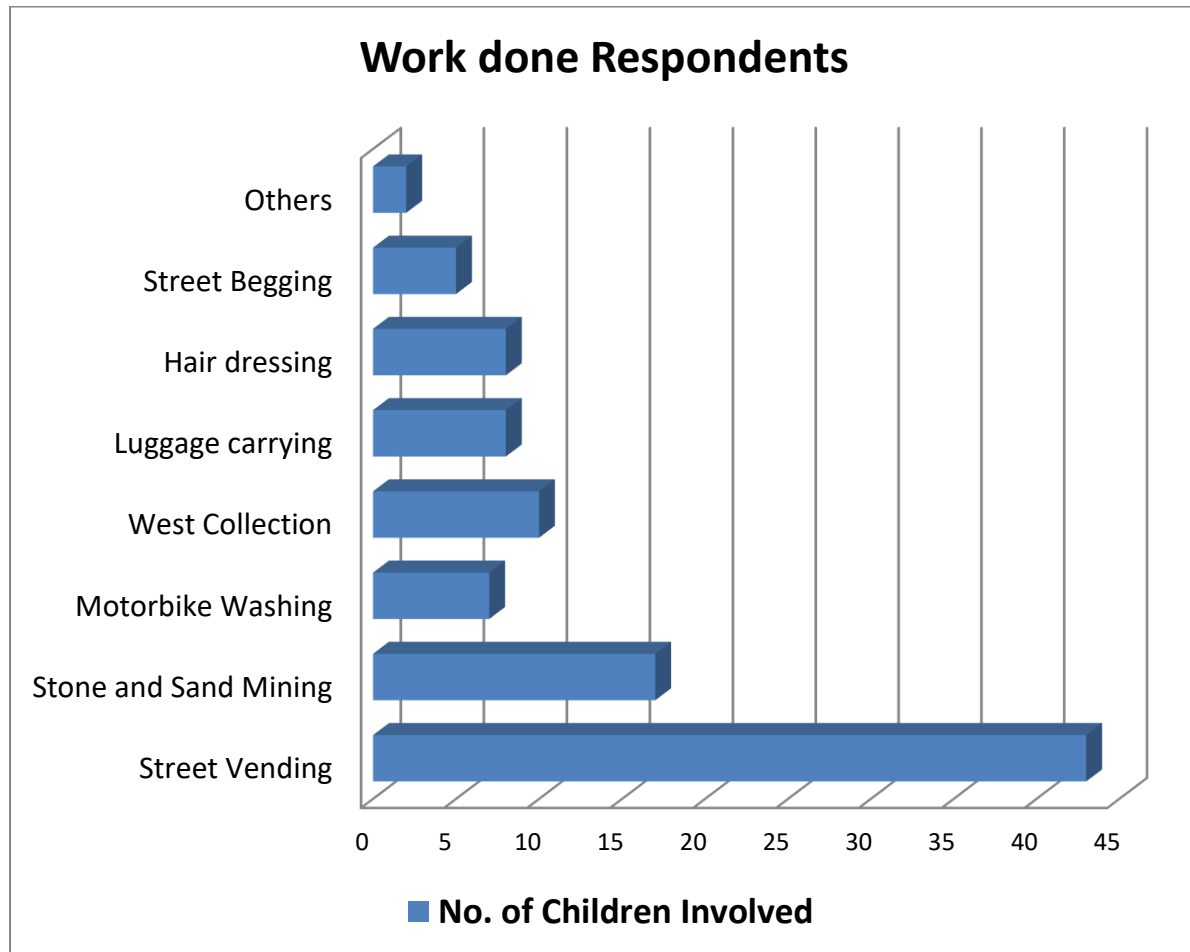


Figure III: child labour activities in Kenema City

Effects of Child Labour: Child labour has varying effects on children. The effects catalogued by the children were regular absence from school leading to poor performance and if care is not taken, eventual drop out; maltreatment including beating and or seizure of property when money for items sold gets missing, rape, injuries, stunted growth, and risk of contracting diseases from eating food left over by others or sexual activities, exposure to criminal activities by peers like pick-pocketing, thieving, gambling, drug abuse and so on. All of the children (100%) agreed that child labour absolutely affects schooling in diverse ways as stated above. Some of the children clearly stated that they did not have the opportunity for schooling because they had to go out to “skate” (fend for their families). A girl explained that she narrowly escaped being raped by a man who took her to a room on the pretext that he was going to buy from her. 59% of the children who did stone mining said they were at one time or the other injured while doing the work.

One of them reported that one of his right toe nails was removed when a stone fell on the foot. 16% reported to have suffered from sexual harassment. Teenagers may end up being impregnated in such instances. 60% of the children (all the girls and 6 boys) agreed that child labour can lead to teenage pregnancy. Some talked about their peers who had become pregnant because they went out with men only to make ends meet. 66% of them stated that child labour robs them of parental love. That they go out to do various work, they have little or no time to stay around their parents. While the children dwelt mainly on the negative effects, the ten key informants also considered some benefits child labour accords the children, their families and others. 40% of them said that the proceeds from child labour augments family income, while 30% said that though it can be a way of exploiting children, it can be a means to access cheap labour. 20% of them stated that some of the work children do (hair dressing for instance) can make them acquire skills. They stated that giving the above points did not in any way suggest that they supported the act.

Table III: Effects of Child Labour

Effects of Child Labour	No. of children
Effects of Schooling	50
Injuries	10
Maltreatment	15
Teenage Pregnancy	30
Spread of diseases	28
Stunted growth	10
Loss of dignity	7
Little or no time for recreation	16
Loss of parental love	33
Economic exploitation of children	6
Supplementing family income	4
Provision of cheap labour	3
Skills acquisition by children	2

Existing Strategies to tackle child labour: The ten key informants gave highlights of the strategies that institutions they represented had adopted to clamp down on child labour including strategic engagement, policy advocacy and monitoring, 30%; community sensitisation on child rights, 40%; and enforcement of labour laws, 20%.

Table IV shows the strategies to tackle child labour in Kenema city

Strategy Adopted	No. of respondents who talked about it
Strategic engagement policy advocacy and monitoring	3
Community sensitization on child rights	4
Enforcement of labour laws	2
Collaborating with other stakeholders	1

Effectiveness of the Strategies adopted: The effectiveness of the strategies can be assessed by the results of the strategies. 10% of the respondents reported that with the adoption of the strategies, there were instances in which children were withdrawn from hazardous work and sent to school or vocational institutions. 20% reported communities integrating child protection into their by-laws while another 10% talked about communities reporting cases of child labour to appropriate authorities as shown in table V. On the whole though the percentages were not encouraging, some effort was being applied. Some of the respondents talked about the invisible nature of some forms of child labour since the children work at homes and can therefore not be easily reached.

Table V: Effectiveness of institutional initiatives to reduce child labour

Result of initiative Adopted	Rating
Withdrawal of children from hazardous work to be sent to school/ vocational centers	10%
Integration of child protection into community by-laws	20%
Reporting of child labour issues to appropriate authorities	10%

Conclusion and Recommendations: Child labour in various forms exists in Kenema City. There seems to be a level of ignorance about it in some quarters and even though national, regional and institutional laws exist about it, there is a general weakness in the enforcement of the laws.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that:

- The government and its development partners should do their level best to reduce the high level of poverty in the country which in many instances has left parents with no option but to let their children work to augment meager family income irrespective of the implications of the work for the children.

- Mass sensitisation campaigns should be launched on child labour to reduce the gross ignorance of those who think it is justifiable for children to engage in any kind of work to help their parents even when inimical to them.
- Budgetary allocations to government line ministries, departments and agencies such as the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) and the Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone Police (SLPFSU) should be raised to enhance their activities in forestalling child labour.
- Since an idle mind is the devil's workshop, government of Sierra Leone and the donor partners should ensure increased access to education to meaningfully engage children and reduce the possibility for them to be subjected to child labour.
- Children should be sensitised about their rights so that they too can be instrumental in protection their rights.
- There should be political commitment to ensure that child labour is mainstreamed into broader development plans and programmes.
- As child labour cuts across different sectors and areas of ministerial responsibility, progress against it should be made by clearly delineating institutional roles and ensuring that effective coordination and information sharing structures are put in place.

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